

record
life stories

testimony

Oral History Interview Guidelines

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

understand
listen

memory
history

recollect

Oral History Interview Guidelines

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

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Oral History Interview Guidelines

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THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM is America's national institution for the documentation, study, and interpretation of Holocaust history, and serves as this country's memorial to the millions of people murdered during the Holocaust.

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry and other victims by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims—approximately six million were murdered; Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), people with disabilities, and Poles also were targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny.

The Museum's primary mission is to advance and disseminate knowledge about this unprecedented tragedy, to preserve the memory of those who suffered, and to encourage its visitors to reflect upon the moral and spiritual questions raised by the events of the Holocaust as well as their own responsibilities as citizens of a democracy.

Chartered by a unanimous Act of Congress in 1980 and situated adjacent to the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the Museum strives to broaden public understanding of the history of the Holocaust through multifaceted programs, including exhibitions; research and publication; collecting and preserving material evidence, art, and artifacts relating to the Holocaust; annual Holocaust commemorations known as the Days of Remembrance; distribution of educational materials and teacher resources; and a variety of public programming designed to enhance understanding of the Holocaust and related issues, including those of contemporary significance.

THE ORAL HISTORY BRANCH of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum produces video- and audiotaped testimonies of Holocaust survivors, rescuers, liberators, resistance fighters, prosecutors, perpetrators, and bystanders. The mission is to document and preserve Holocaust testimonies as primary sources that will allow future generations of students, researchers, teachers, and filmmakers to hear and see the people who experienced, witnessed, or perpetrated the genocidal policies and crimes of the Nazis and their collaborators. Part of the Museum's mandate is to produce oral histories that add to our knowledge of all genocides.

The Museum has been collecting and producing oral histories since 1989—four years before it opened. As of 2007, it has created an archive of more than 9,000 audio and video testimonies, mostly in English. Of those, the Museum itself has produced more than 2,000, including more than 350 Hebrew-language interviews of Jewish

survivors who emigrated to Israel, and more than 100 of Jehovah's Witnesses who survived Nazi persecution. Although the Museum has focused on producing videotaped testimonies of Jewish and non-Jewish survivors—including Polish Catholics, Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), political prisoners, homosexuals, and members of resistance and partisan groups—the full range of interviews includes rescuers, liberators, postwar prosecutors of Nazi crimes, displaced persons camp relief workers, and members of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

The unedited audio and videotapes, which are housed in the Museum's Archives, serve as resources for scholars, educators, filmmakers, and the public. In addition, the Museum now has more than 100 agreements with other organizations and individuals to house their interviews within the Museum's Archives.

Because of their powerful impact, edited segments of some interviews are included in the Museum's permanent and special exhibitions and public programs, as well as the Museum's Wexner Learning Center and Web site.

With the generous support of a number of grants, the Oral History Branch is working to further its mission in building an oral history collection that represents the breadth of Nazi persecution. Projects supported by the grants include the production of interviews with survivors living in Belarus, Greece, Macedonia, Poland, Ukraine, the Czech Republic (with Roma), Israel, and the former Yugoslavia; interviews with witnesses, collaborators, and perpetrators in Estonia, former Yugoslavia, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, the Nether-

lands, Poland, Romania, and Ukraine; the Post-Holocaust Interview Project, which traces the lives of survivors after the Holocaust; the production of educational videos and other resources, and transcripts of interviews to increase accessibility of our oral history collection; and the ongoing preservation and cataloging of the collection.

INTRODUCTION

“The story reveals the meaning of what otherwise would remain an unbearable sequence of sheer happenings.”

—Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*

The interview journey through the Holocaust, or other such tragedies, can be a painful and difficult one. To ask survivors of the Holocaust to tell their stories is to ask them to describe the sights, smells, and sounds of the human destruction they witnessed; to relive the deaths of family and friends; and to describe the stories of their own survival. It is one of the most difficult requests one person can make of another.

Yet, the oral history interviews that result from such requests provide glimpses into the history of the Holocaust that cannot be obtained from documents or written records. While textual documents are essential for the study of the Holocaust, an individual’s testimony can supplement those documents by providing a detailed and personal look at a historical event that may be underrepresented or even absent from written works.

These Guidelines provide direction in all aspects of conducting an interview, including making first contact with a potential interviewee,

conducting research and preparing questions for the interview, and exploring technical aspects of recording interviews, both on audio and videotape. The Guidelines also explore the intense interpersonal aspects of the interviewer-interviewee relationship.

*The
interview
process
is an art,
not a science.*

The interview process is an art, not a science. Although many purposes can be served through standardized interviews, they bear little resemblance to what we mean by an “oral history.” The oral history interview is an attempt to provide a place for the interviewee to tell his or her life story as he or she remembers it, and for the interviewer to ask questions that stimulate memory. The questions posed are very important, so studying the subject areas in the person’s life is imperative. But the interaction between interviewee and interviewer can create a bond between the two people that even ill-conceived questions cannot destroy. It is within that bond that questions and answers flow, and that history is revealed.

Defining an oral history interview this way creates a broad mandate. It assumes that there is no single correct interview technique or mode, and that different styles of interviewing are acceptable. This concept of different styles can be clarified by comparing the interview process with musical interpretation. If one listens to Horowitz, Rubinstein, Argerich, and Guller playing a Chopin sonata, one will hear the same piece of music, but it will sound different with each pianist. Is one style right and the other wrong? Within certain limits, one cannot admit to such a judgment; the issue of taste is a separate matter. Since interviewing is an art, strategies for success must be varied. Thus, the same person may give distinct, even divergent interviews

to different interviewers. The same or similar questions may produce different answers because of the particular bond between an interviewer and an interviewee. A variety of other circumstances also can affect the interview—the setting, a personal difficulty, the weather. Even though we are listening to one person’s story and trying to facilitate its telling, the story will not necessarily sound the same on any given day, with any given interviewer. For this reason, we maintain an expansive view of the interview process to take advantage of these variables.

Since interviewing is an art, strategies for success must be varied.

This is not to say that there are no limits or boundaries. For example, an interviewer ordinarily should not argue with an interviewee. Although interviewees make mistakes, it is not the role of interviewers to correct them during interviews. Interviewees may say things that stimulate conversation, but a conversation is not our aim. Rather, our aim is to listen. Nevertheless, such limits should not constrain probing questions when answers are too minimal, confusing, or even seem mistaken, or when the interviewer thinks a question is necessary.

There is certain basic information that should be included in each oral history interview that makes it accessible and usable for the listener. Interviewers should not become so engrossed in the interview process that they forget to ask for specific dates, names, and locations that help place the interviewee’s experiences in historical context.

Genuine listening means that the interviewer hears the contours of the story as it is being told. Often, important subjects in an interviewee’s story are only hinted at; the interviewer must keep a constant watch for these hints. The interviewer guides the interview, but does not direct it. The interviewer is a facilitator of the interview, but does not

Comfort with long silences is crucial to the listening process.

manipulate it. This is not a place for ego to be exhibited; interviewers should not use the interview to prove their knowledge. Comfort with long silences is crucial to the listening process, and the timing of questions often requires the interviewer to sit through the silences of the interviewee's internal dialogue.

Because the content of these interviews is often tragic and terrifying, learning to listen also means that the interviewer needs to discern his or her own fears. We sometimes intuitively want to protect ourselves from what interviewees have to say. However, we must learn to listen to everything about which the interviewee is able to speak. We must be able to ask about everything in a way that invites response. This means that difficult questions usually should be posed in a simple, straightforward way. If we expose our fears by asking questions emotionally, people often will respond to that emotion in an attempt to protect us, rather than to answer the question we have posed. Therefore, we must respect the interviewee's limits, but not allow our own limitations to restrain the stories that interviewees can tell us.

As interviewers, we travel with the interviewee. We try to see more than the mere representation of the interviewee's experiences. We attempt to sit within the person's story as if nothing else exists, and we try to understand. We try to understand from the inside as if we were there—much like the musician playing a piece of music. But we are always outsiders, even while we share an intimacy with the interviewee. It is important to balance our ability to listen empathetically with our ability to listen carefully and critically.

These Guidelines are intended to be used as a reference throughout the interview process. They may be useful to the individual who plans to conduct only a few interviews, to the newly established organization interested in initiating its own oral history project, or to the already established organization looking for new insight and methods for conducting oral history interviews. The Guidelines focus more on preparing for and conducting the interview than on preserving it archivally; however, we cannot overemphasize the importance of proper post-production treatment of the interview (storage, preservation, cataloging, etc.). *See Chapter X, After the Interview, for more information.*

*As interviewers,
we travel with
the interviewee.*

The Guidelines were originally created for the Oral History Branch's own interviewers, and often make specific references to resources available for public use at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. However, they also provide general advice that can be applied to a wide variety of oral history projects, particularly those with a Holocaust or genocide-studies orientation. They also provide suggestions for finding resources in other libraries and resource centers.

I. THE PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW

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The Oral History Branch gathers names of potential interviewees from a variety of sources. From these referrals, we elicit more information primarily through the preliminary interview. Preliminary interviews often are conducted by volunteers, who use a questionnaire as a guide to ensure that no basic information is neglected. These preliminary interviews usually are conducted over the telephone. After each is completed, the interviewer writes a summary of it, based on the questionnaire and notes taken during the interview.

Preliminary interviews serve a variety of purposes. They help us determine with whom to conduct full-length recorded interviews; they provide an outline of the interviewee's experiences on which research for the full-length interview is based; and they provide at least a basic summary of the interviewee's experiences for future use in the event

that we are not able to follow up with a full-length interview. The interviewee receives a copy of the typed preliminary interview summary, and is asked to check it for accuracy.

After the telephone interview is completed, the file goes to the Director of Oral History, who decides whether or not to conduct a formal interview with that person. The Oral History Branch has established some interview priorities, which are subject to change as the representation in our collection changes.

In general, we look for persons who have compelling or interesting stories. Clarity of memory and the ability to relate one's experiences in a coherent narrative often will take precedence over any priority list. At the same time, if a person's ability to tell his or her story is less than perfect, the historical importance of a story may take precedence. Since we are limited in the numbers of interviews we can do per year, we must use some criteria for the choices we make, even though the criteria need to be flexible.

Purpose
of the
Preliminary
Interview

An essential part of the preparation for a full-length, recorded interview is the preliminary interview (unless there already exists some detailed material about the interviewee's experiences, such as a written memoir). The information gathered at the preliminary interview often is the basis for all other interview preparation.

Most oral history projects cannot interview everyone who wishes to be interviewed. Thus, another primary function of the preliminary interview is to gather sufficient information to determine whether or not a full-length video or audio interview should be conducted.

The aim of the preliminary interview is different from that of the full-length recorded interview. The purpose of the preliminary interview is to create an outline of the interviewee's story. This limits the scope of a preliminary interview in comparison with a full-length interview. In a sense, the

preliminary interview is designed to be more clinical than the full-length interview. For example, a questionnaire is very helpful for use in a preliminary interview to guide the discussion and to ensure that the basic information has been covered. Conversely, such a standard set of questions usually is not used in a full-length interview. Rather, individualized questions are formulated based on the preliminary interview information. The full-length oral history goes into much greater depth and detail, and includes more reflection than the preliminary interview.

This limited scope must be kept in mind in order to conduct an effective preliminary interview. However, it should not limit your ability to engage in the interview process with sensitivity and tact. It may be a challenge for both interviewer and interviewee to discuss such difficult subject matter over the telephone with a stranger. Thus, the preliminary interview requires knowledge, delicacy, perception, and skill.

If you plan to conduct preliminary interviews with many people, we recommend that you create a questionnaire. Questionnaires need not be strict; they may contain a list of suggested questions from which the interviewer may choose while conducting the preliminary interview. However, certain consistent information should be gathered in the preliminary interview, such as the interviewee's date and place of birth, and a basic chronology of his or her wartime locations. The Museum has created several questionnaires for varying interviewee experiences. We have separate questionnaires for the Holocaust survivor, witness, liberator, rescuer, and perpetrator. Although these categories are by no means perfect, they provide structure while allowing a certain degree of flexibility in conducting preliminary interviews. *See Appendix 1 for an example of our most-used questionnaire, the Survivor Questionnaire.*

If you plan to make the questionnaires available to researchers, be sure to ask the interviewees for permission to use the information for research purposes. Interviewees will most likely comply if you assure them that their addresses and telephone numbers will not be released to researchers without their consent.

Creating a
Questionnaire

Providing
Options
for the
Interviewee

Often the telephone maintains a distance between interviewer and interviewee that makes it difficult to explore the heart of the interviewee's story. If the interviewee expresses discomfort in talking about certain experiences over the telephone, the interviewer must respect that wish and accept the limitations of interviewing by telephone. In such cases, it is wise to have a questionnaire on hand to send to the interviewee.

However, getting a sense of how someone speaks is an important criterion in determining whether or not to proceed with a full-length interview. The telephone often is the only viable way to determine that. If an interviewee deems the telephone inappropriate, you might suggest that the person write a basic outline of his or her experiences or fill out a questionnaire, and ask permission to call again afterward with a few follow-up questions.

Preliminary interviews also may be conducted in person. However, the interviewer should make it clear that the preliminary interview is only intended to gather information in preparation for an interview and that it is not an in-depth recorded interview. This can be confusing for interviewees, who may be more inclined to go into detail about their experiences in person than they would over the telephone.

Conducting
the Preliminary
Interview

In the preliminary interview, find out the basic chronology of the interviewee's experiences, including dates and locations, so you will be able to conduct thorough research and construct thoughtful questions for the recorded interview.

How Much
Detail?

One challenge of the preliminary interview is to create a balance between being too concise and being too verbose. If it is necessary to err, err on the side of including too much information rather than too little. More information is always better than not enough because all further preparation and research will be based on what is gathered at the preliminary interview (unless other information exists, such as a memoir).

Conduct the preliminary interview more than a week in advance of the recorded interview (preferably several weeks in advance). Otherwise, you may have the problem of the interviewee saying over and over again on tape, “As I told you last week” Conducting the preliminary interview weeks in advance of the recorded interview also will allow you time to call the interviewee with additional questions, should any arise during the process of preparing research for the interview.

Timing
of the
Preliminary
Interview

When deciding whether or not to proceed with a full-length interview, it is important to consider not only what the interviewee said, but how it was said. This requires the interviewer to describe the preliminary interview, including clarity of speech and memory; the ability to relate experiences in a coherent narrative; and the ability to reflect upon and create a context for those experiences. *See page 74 (Appendix 1) for a sample format of the preliminary interview assessment.*

Assessing the
Preliminary
Interview

The interviewer should write a summary of the preliminary interview soon after it is conducted. The longer the interviewer postpones writing the summary, the more difficult it will be to remember how scattered notes fit together into a narrative. Alternatively, we highly recommend that you invest in a recording device that can be connected to your telephone. You then can use the recording to write the summary and use it for review purposes. However, do not think of the recording as a substitute for the written summary, because audiotapes are more difficult to review than written summaries. Also, do not consider the recording of the preliminary interview as an archival document that can be kept in lieu of an in-person taped interview. Tapes are expensive and take up space, and it is time consuming to preserve them properly. The quality of recorded telephone interviews will not be high enough to warrant such time and expense. *See Appendix 2 for a sample preliminary interview summary.*

Summarizing
the Preliminary
Interview

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II. MAKING ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE INTERVIEW

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Once you have determined who you would like to interview on tape, and have a time frame in mind, contact the interviewee to see if he or she is willing to be interviewed, and to offer more information about your project. Be sure to let the interviewee know what is expected of him or her before the interview takes place. For example, give an estimate of how long you expect the interview to last, how the interview will be used once it is completed, where the interview will take place, and who will be present at the interview. Also explain that a release form must be signed, and give the interviewee a sense of what is included in the form. *See “Legal and Ethical Considerations” (page 8) for more information about release forms.* Being as informative as possible can make interviewees feel more comfortable and in control of a difficult process, about which they may feel quite vulnerable.

Contacting
the
Interviewee

When scheduling the interview, be sure to allow plenty of time for conducting research and preparing for the interview. Many factors may necessitate a lengthy preparation period, particularly if you have not conducted Holocaust-related oral history interviews before. If this is the case, be sure to review these Guidelines thoroughly before setting a date for the interview, so you will have a good sense of the time required to prepare.

Scheduling
the Interview

Interview
Note Taker

If you are conducting a video interview in a studio, there may be a greenroom, where one can sit and watch the interview as it is being conducted. This is a room, separate from the studio, with a TV monitor. In this scenario, someone can take notes there as the interview transpires without distracting or disturbing the interview. It is helpful to have the note taker write down the phonetic spellings of any personal names or obscure place names that are mentioned. The note taker then can confirm spellings before the interviewee leaves the studio. This is important because some spellings are impossible to confirm without the help of the interviewee. If you decide to have a note taker at the interview, give that person plenty of advance notice.

If there is no greenroom or similar setup available, do not plan to have a note taker in the same room where the interview is being conducted. Instead, wait to confirm spellings until you have made a copy of the tape. In this event, the person who takes notes will want to do so as soon as a copy of the tape (or transcript) is available, so that he or she can call the interviewee before too much time passes.

Individuals
Present at
Interview

We generally recommend that few people as possible be present in the room during the interview. The presence of an interviewee's family member, while comforting for the interviewee, may distract the interviewer or the interviewee. However, handle this decision on a case-by-case basis, and make exceptions for those who strongly prefer a family member to be present.

Legal and
Ethical
Considerations

The Oral History Association has written principles and standards for conducting oral history interviews that detail the responsibility of any interview project to its interviewees, the public, the profession, and sponsoring and archival institutions. Review and follow these principles and standards in the conduct of any oral history project. *See Selected Bibliography (Appendix 5) for more information.*

To obtain the right to use an interview in your archives or in any production, each person you interview must sign a legal release form. This form will determine who owns copyright of the interview and under what terms or restrictions the copyright is owned. If no form is signed, copyright

of the interview will automatically belong jointly to the interviewer and the interviewee. For more information on legal issues involved with conducting oral history interviews, see *Oral History and the Law* by John A. Neuen-schwander. *See Appendix 5 for more information.*

If you plan to donate an interview to an archive, you most likely will be required to supply a signed release form along with the interview. The kind of release form you create will depend on the goal of your interview collection. Several sample release forms can be found in the book *Doing Oral History* by Donald A. Ritchie. *See Appendix 5 for more information.*

After you have confirmed a date for the interview, send the interviewee a standard information sheet or letter that reiterates the basic arrangements for the interview, including when and where it will take place, who will conduct it, how long you expect the session to last, etc. Enclose a copy of the release form so the interviewee can review it carefully and ask any questions before the interview. You should be very familiar with the release form, and explain it carefully to the interviewee either before the interview or at the interview. Ask the interviewee to bring the release form to the interview, but be sure to bring an extra copy in case the interviewee forgets his or hers.

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III. CONDUCTING RESEARCH

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You need not be an expert on the Holocaust to conduct a successful interview. However, you must have knowledge and understanding of the basic historical facts. The people you interview will expect this as well. In addition, you must become knowledgeable about the particular circumstances of your interviewee's history. The most important ingredient for a successful interview is the preparation that you do before the recorded interview. Even the most experienced interviewer will spend hours preparing for an interview by reading historical material

relevant to the interviewee's story and preparing questions based specifically on that material. Preparation is critical.

There are thousands of books and articles about the Holocaust in print. The *Selected Bibliography (Appendix 5)* includes what we consider the most useful published sources. Once you have determined whom you will interview, it is critical that you gather sufficient research materials tailored to that person. The Oral History Branch has developed the following step-by-step guide to help make the process go smoothly.

Set Aside
Time for
Research

Once you have the summary of the interviewee's experiences in hand, begin to do your research. Expect to depend on the help of a good local library, Holocaust resource center, or other research facility to get this research done.

Plan to spend at least three to four hours gathering your research materials and four hours or more reading and preparing questions for each interview you do. It is likely that for each interview, the total time spent on research, reading, and preparing questions will be at least eight hours. When you are doing research, try to be realistic about how many pages of reading you will be able to do prior to the interview (some Holocaust resource centers and libraries don't allow patrons to check out books, so photocopying may be necessary). Be selective and photocopy only the most relevant materials (rather than *all possible* relevant materials). With four hours set aside for reading and preparing questions, you should try to limit the research packet to 100 pages of photocopied materials. Even with 100 pages or less, there may be some pages that you will read very closely and others that you will skim. Of course, if you intend to spend more time reading, you will want to copy more materials. The goal, however, is to collect the most suitable research for the specific interviewee's experiences, rather than indiscriminately photocopying every article or book on a certain topic.

Start by reviewing the preliminary interview questionnaire and the summary that was based on the telephone interview and any other information in the interviewee's file. Take note of the people, places, events, and organizations that you want to learn more about in preparation for the full-length interview. We recommend that you jot down a one to two-page overview of the person's experiences, incorporating information from the questionnaire, the summary, and other materials in the file. It can be helpful to write these notes in bullet or outline fashion. *See Appendix 3 for a sample interviewee overview.*

Review
Interviewee's
Experiences

Read the following guidelines to get a sense of the questions you can ask yourself as you review the information in the interviewee's file and take notes on the most important items to research.

Important
Items to
Research

Names of Interviewees

You may be able to find specific references in published sources about an interviewee if that person or an immediate family member was well known or had an unusual position—such as an administrator within the *Judenrat* (Jewish Council) at the Lodz ghetto—or was part of a small or select group, such as an escapee of Treblinka or Auschwitz. Make a special note of the interviewee's name(s) during the war for doing this kind of research. Often, people changed their names after the war when they immigrated to the United States or other countries.

Names of People Mentioned by Interviewees

Use the same considerations as above. Try to get more information about a person with whom the interviewee had contact, especially if that person was well known, had an unusual position, or was part of a small or select group (for example, it could be someone now known to have been a protector or rescuer or perpetrator). Again, consider the possibility that someone could have different names (birth name, war name, postwar name, etc.).

Places

Whenever possible, research the place where the interviewee grew up as a child. Whether it was a large city or small village, some information usually can be found in published sources. Then research other places to which the

interviewee went or was taken during the Holocaust/war and immediately after (ghettos, camps, towns or cities where he or she might have hid, displaced persons camps). Make a note of all places you wish to research. Make it a priority to research those places where the interviewee may have had memorable experiences and/or stayed for a considerable period of time. Conversely, if the interviewee was taken to a camp for a half-day stopover and did not have memorable experiences there, it would not be necessary to do much research about that camp for the interview.

Events/Organizations

Do research on events that the interviewee experienced or witnessed, as well as organizations and movements in which the interviewee participated. Do enough research on events and organizations so that you are familiar with the details and can visualize scenarios that the interviewee may discuss.

In most cases, you will know which events and organizations to research based on the information in the person's file. However, as you read about the places where the interviewee grew up and went thereafter, it is important to be aware of the dates when the interviewee was in each place and to be on the lookout for events that the interviewee may have experienced or witnessed, even if the interviewee had not previously mentioned the events. Often, if you are familiar with events that occurred in a particular place, you can prepare more thoughtful and stimulating questions. This knowledge can be especially important in cases where an interviewee forgot to mention events when the preliminary interview was conducted.

Things You
Can Do at
Home

There may be some preliminary research that you can do at home prior to making a visit to a library or Holocaust resource center. First check any Holocaust-related books that you may have in your home library for information pertaining to the interviewee. We have attached to these Guidelines a *Selected Bibliography (Appendix 5)*, consisting of what we consider some helpful resources on Holocaust history, Holocaust research, and oral history methodology. This is by no means a comprehensive bibliography, but it should be helpful as a starting point. The text that we recommend most highly on the history of the Holocaust is *The Destruction of the European Jews* (three volumes) by Raul Hilberg. You may be interested in purchasing some

of the other books listed in the bibliography, but by no means will all of the books listed be useful to you for each interview that you do. It is impossible to buy enough books that deal with all the possible research topics in-depth, so the sources you would have at home will most likely be helpful for the preliminary, more general stages of research.

You may wish to write to various Holocaust resource centers or other research facilities to learn if they have any information on the subjects of interest to you. When writing to research facilities, be precise about the kind of information you are seeking, and conscientious about any research facility's limited capacity for answering detailed research questions. Responses may be slower than you expect. A list and contact information for Holocaust resource centers can be found in the *Directory of the Association of Holocaust Organizations*, which is updated annually. Copies of this directory may be obtained by contacting the Holocaust Resource Center and Archives of the Queensborough Community College in Bayside, New York. The Museum Web site houses the USHMM International Catalogue of audio and video testimonies. See "*Research*" on the Museum's Web site.

Many research facilities' holdings are now searchable on the Internet, so a few keyword searches may yield positive results. If you have a computer with access to the Internet and are able to visit the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to conduct your research, you can search the Museum's Library and Archives collections before your visit.

Eventually, you will need to visit a local library, Holocaust resource center, or other research facility. Keep in mind that if you are working with a local library, the selection of books may be limited, and you might have to obtain the books you are looking for through an interlibrary loan. This can take several weeks, so plan ahead.

If you can visit the Museum's Library and Archives, it is best to do so on a weekday (except for national holidays) between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. because many more resources are available then than on weekends. You may use the Library's collection on-site only. If you are interested in listening to testimonies from the Museum's collection of interviews, you may request them from the Reference Archivist. Refer to the Reference Archivist also for access to unpublished documents in the Archives collection. The Photographic

Visit a
Library or
Research
Facility

Reference Collection and Survivors Registry also are potential sources for relevant information.

Maps Begin your research by obtaining copies of maps that reflect the places where the interviewee grew up and went during the Holocaust and immediate post-war periods. Even if you are familiar with geography, it is best to treat each interview as distinct and re-familiarize yourself with the specific locations of the interviewee’s experiences. The goal is to become intimately aware of the person’s path prior to, during, and immediately after the Holocaust. By highlighting the locations on maps, it is easier to obtain an understanding of the distances covered from one place to the next. In general, maps provide a good opportunity to visualize the interviewee’s experiences.

An excellent source for maps is the *National Geographic Atlas of the World*. You can make a copy of the maps of countries pertinent to the interviewee, then highlight the relevant towns and cities on each map. Often if a person went to several different countries, you will want to make a copy of a map of Europe and highlight relevant place names on it, as well as on maps of each country.

If you still need to identify the country in which a town is located, or if it is difficult to find a town on a map, look up the place name in the atlas’ index. If you find the place name, turn to the appropriate page of the atlas and use the coordinates listed in the index to locate the place on the map. Then highlight it on your copy of that page.

**Other
Resources
for Locating
Places**

If you do not find the place in the index of the atlas, there are other sources to use. It always is key to consider that the place name may be spelled incorrectly or that a name has changed over the years and a different version is more commonly accepted today.

Check the following additional sources when trying to locate a place (town, city, ghetto, camp):

Columbia Lippincott Gazetteer

Das nationalsozialistische Lagersystem (also known as the Arolsen List—especially useful for identifying camps)

Encyclopedia of the Holocaust

Encyclopaedia Judaica

The Ghetto Anthology

Historical Atlas of the Holocaust

Maps of specific countries (showing greater detail than the *National Geographic Atlas of the World*)

Where Once We Walked

Yizkor Books (memorial books, mostly written in Yiddish or Hebrew)

See Selected Bibliography (Appendix 5) for more information on these sources and a list of our other most-used published sources.

It usually is possible to find the place in one or more of these sources. There will be rare instances when a place is so obscure that it cannot be found. In such cases, you should be able to get an idea of the town or city that is closest to the place in question.

You may be able to fulfill a substantial amount of your research inquiries by using our *Selected Bibliography (Appendix 5)* of the published sources, especially if you are looking for information on a well-known topic such as “Auschwitz,” “Lodz ghetto,” or “Dr. Mengele.” But you also will want to check for relevant information in a library’s larger collection of books (and relevant unpublished materials, if available). Additionally, many of the books listed in our bibliography contain extensive bibliographies of their own.

Expanding
Your Search
for Resources

The Museum will be a helpful resource for conducting interviews if you are in the area and have an opportunity to visit. The sections below provide guidance on how to use resources in the Museum’s various divisions. In addition, some of the Museum’s resources are searchable on the Internet.

Using the
Museum’s
Resources

The Museum’s Web site address is www.ushmm.org.

Once you are at the web site, select the option to search “Research” which includes the Library and Archives. In doing these searches, you will be

able to get the call numbers for materials you are interested in reviewing when you come to the Museum.

Library

If you have the opportunity to visit the Museum, you can use the Library's computer catalog to find specific books that are relevant to your research. If you are using this system for the first time, ask the Reference Librarian for an introduction to how it works. Even if you have used the system before, feel free to ask for assistance.

With titles and call numbers written down, you can find the books on the Library's shelves. If you cannot locate a book, ask the Reference Librarian for help (occasionally a book is waiting to be shelved or has been mis-shelved).

Begin your search for information with the book's table of contents. Next, check the index (if one exists). Also, refer to the book's bibliography for more sources. Often, information can be found simply by flipping through the pages of a book. There will be times when you will not find relevant information in a book, even though its title gave you the impression that it would be helpful. Similarly, a book that didn't appear useful by its title may have relevant information. Thus, it is good to be on the lookout for books other than the one you are trying to locate on the shelves, since books on the same topic are shelved together. After you have removed a book and are finished reviewing it, place it on the designated re-shelving carts. Do not re-shelve it. If you obtained the book from the Reference Desk, return it to the desk.

We recommend that you wait until you have had the opportunity to review the Library sources you've gathered before making copies. By waiting until you have reviewed most of your materials, you will have a better sense of the most relevant pages to photocopy. When you have determined the pages you want to photocopy, ask the Reference Librarian for assistance.

Archives

You may want to check the Archives for information, especially if you have not found much material in the Library. There is a separate computer catalog at the Museum that searches for the Archives' holdings. Also, you would want to search the Archives' holdings if you think the interviewee may have donated his or her unpublished writings.

Photographic Reference Collection

Occasionally, an interviewee will mention that he or she was photographed in the ghettos or camps. There may be other times when you have reason to believe there may be photographs of the interviewee from that time period. Go to the Photographic Reference Collection to see if such photographs are at the Museum. Also, check with them if you have not found much information on a town, camp, or ghetto, but believe there may be photographs of the place.

As you are conducting your research, it may become apparent that you need further clarification or elaboration on an aspect of the interviewee's experiences in order to effectively carry out your research. In this event, call the interviewee directly and ask for a clarification, leaving enough time before the interview to allow you to do more research if necessary.

If You Need
Clarification

Even with clarifying information from the interviewee, it may be difficult to find relevant materials on certain topics, such as lesser-known towns, ghettos, camps, etc. Consult with a Holocaust resource center when seeking specialized information.

Challenges

When you have completed your research, it is helpful to write down a list of the sources you have compiled. *See Appendix 4 for a sample research list.* Keep this list in the interviewee's file; it may be useful to someone in the future (for example, if a follow-up interview is arranged).

Research
List

When to
Stop

Ideally, after three to four hours of skimming materials and making photocopies of items you want to read or review later, you will have compiled a well-rounded research packet. In essence, the packet should represent detailed information about the interviewee's experiences (much of this information would have been gathered in the preliminary interview) and the larger historical context of the interviewee's experiences. Review the section "*Important Items to Research*" (page 13) and the overview you made based on the preliminary interview to make sure you have covered the important points.

IV. PREPARING QUESTIONS

Chapter Overview

Notes on Preparing Questions, 21

Organizing Questions, 21

Using Questions in the Interview, 22

For every interview, it is essential to know about the interviewee's history so you can construct questions that directly relate to that person. Use the research materials that you have gathered and a good chronology of events as references in preparing questions. Additionally, you may find some questions that are relevant to your interview in our list of suggested questions.

You will be constructing questions from the time you have the preliminary interview information in hand through the recorded interview itself. Therefore, as you prepare your questions, it is important to consider how you plan to conduct the interview and what direction you anticipate the interview will take. *See Chapter VII, Conducting the Interview.* Consider what kinds of information you want to get from the interviewee and look for blank spots and intriguing areas in the preliminary interview summary that you would like to explore.

Notes on
Preparing
Questions

Some interviewers type up pages of questions prior to the interview, but then put them aside before they begin the actual interview, because looking at a list of questions can be distracting from listening to the interviewee. This works if you have an excellent memory and a great deal of experience conducting

Organizing
Questions

interviews. We recommend instead that you write down your questions, highlighting those you consider most important, so you can read them easily during the interview.

Organize your questions chronologically, perhaps in phases, such as “prewar life,” “Lodz ghetto,” “Auschwitz,” “liberation,” etc. In other words, organize the questions according to the major episodes of the interviewee’s experiences. Then, during the interview, hold your list of questions in your lap, and only glance at it occasionally to be sure that important questions do not go unanswered. You may wish to write your questions on several 4 x 6 index cards, which make little noise when handled during the interview. Ideally, you will be familiar enough with your questions that you will need to refer to them only occasionally, if at all, during the interview.

Using
Questions
in the
Interview

During the interview itself, do not plan to ask one question after another as they are listed on the page. Often an interviewee will anticipate and answer your questions, and there will be no need for you to ask them. If you are overly concerned about having the interviewee answer your specific questions, you will be distracted from what the interviewee is telling you. Therefore, even though you have your questions written down, you should attempt to have your most important questions in your mind, rather than depending on a piece of paper. If you have a thorough sense of the events in the interviewee’s life before you begin the interview, then the information that the interviewee gives you during the interview should remind you of your questions. Allow yourself to follow the interviewee’s lead and put your questions aside for parts of the interview. You may find that what the interviewee is telling you will prompt new questions that you had not even considered.

In any interview, focus on asking questions that invite reflection on the part of the interviewee, rather than one-word responses. Generally avoid yes or no questions. Still, good questions do not have to be complicated or flashy. One of the best sentences you can use during the interview to elicit details is, “Tell me more about that.”

V. SUGGESTED THEMES

Chapter Overview

Family/Occupation/Education, 23

Religion and Politics, 24

Gender, 24

We have highlighted below a few thematic areas within the broad spectrum of Holocaust experiences that you might consider weaving into the interview. These are meant to be suggestive rather than exhaustive, and some interviewees' experiences may call for a different set of thematic areas.

Once you are familiar with your interviewee's experiences, consider identifying certain themes that run through his or her life, and create your own outline of themes. If you find that the themes outlined below are applicable to your interviewee's experiences, go to Chapter VI for some suggested questions that relate to the themes you have outlined.

It is important to have some idea of the ways in which education (religious, musical, scientific, etc.) played a role in a person's life. If one's education or background was not academic (for example, if the person were a trade or skilled laborer), that factor may have provided opportunities that saved his or her life. Knowing the situation in which someone was raised, including home environment; relationship with parents, siblings, and friends; and the parents' occupations, can help us better understand the interviewee's life.

Family/
Occupation/
Education

Religion and
Politics

The religious upbringing and beliefs, as well as the political views or activities of the interviewee and the interviewee's family and friends, are relevant to understanding the interviewee's choices and actions during the Holocaust. When possible, it is helpful to get the interviewee to articulate this background. There even may be some connection between religious practice and political activity that might lead you to deduce something about the connections between the environment in which a person was raised and his or her later actions during Nazi persecution.

Gender

Gender is an area of investigation that is rather new to Holocaust studies as a whole, and in the field of Holocaust oral history, it has generally been ignored as a category. Nevertheless, it is essential to think through questions that relate to gender. Some can be based on physiology, for example, questions about menstruation, pregnancy, abortion, sexual relations, as well as sexual violence.

There also are questions that can be based on cultural and political issues relating to positions of power held by men and women. For example, positions on the *Judenrat* (Jewish Council) were held exclusively by men, but the councils sometimes had to make decisions that specifically affected women. Nazi directives forbidding pregnancy forced the Jewish Councils to make decisions concerning abortions. Decisions about those who would be deported were sometimes made on the basis of gender. Explore how access to jobs, food, and other resources differed for men and women. The similarities in the lives of men and women also warrant exploration.

Other questions relating to gender can be based on the differences in the ghettos, camps, and resistance groups. As men and women were separated in most camp situations, ask about differences in how the two genders related and organized. When men and women were together in ghettos or other places, such as the Czech family camp in Auschwitz, what sort of organization was constructed? Ask questions that elicit the structure of daily life in the camps—food distribution, sharing of food, days off, sanitation, barrack life, work assignments, roll call, friendships, brutality, etc. Such questions clearly pertain to men and women alike.

VI. SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

Chapter Overview

Prewar Life, 26

The First Questions

Childhood Recollections

Nazi Rise to Power

Holocaust/Wartime Experiences, 28

Ghettos and Transit Camps

Labor Camps, Prisons,

Concentration/Extermination Camps

Hiding/Passing and Escaping

Resistance

Postwar Experiences, 34

Liberation

Displaced Persons Camps

Emigration/Immigration

Beyond the War/Life After the Holocaust

Although we do not recommend that you use a standard questionnaire for the interview, it is extremely helpful to be detailed about topics and the kinds of questions you will construct in preparation for an interview. No one should ask as many questions in one interview as we have outlined in this chapter. Rather, these questions serve as a guide to the level of detail we hope an interviewee will reveal. The questions also will provide hints as to what you might ask if the interviewee does not go into details about certain experiences.

When interviewing Holocaust survivors, the structure of the recorded Holocaust testimony is typically divided into three sections: prewar life, the Holocaust and wartime experiences, and postwar experiences. Therefore, we have organized our suggested questions according to these three broad categories. Questions for interviewees with other Holocaust-related experiences, such as liberators, rescuers, bystanders, or postwar relief agency workers, will require a different set of questions than those outlined in this chapter. However, these questions may help you create appropriate questions for other interviewee categories.

PREWAR
LIFE

This section of the interview deals with the interviewee's childhood and upbringing—family life, friends, relationships, schooling, and prewar life in general. Especially when speaking with survivors, this part of the interview should demonstrate the kind of life and culture that was interrupted or destroyed by National Socialism. It is important to get some sense of the person's interests and hobbies, along with the events that marked his or her life prior to the Nazi rise to power or occupation. It also is important to draw out the interviewee's earliest recollections of the Nazis—especially what he or she heard or read or experienced, such as the escalation of restrictions and legal measures, and how they affected family, school, friends.

The First
Questions

1. What was your name at birth? (Sometimes people have changed their names, thus it is important to get this information at the outset. Throughout the interview, when it is relevant, be sure to ask about nicknames or other name changes, including changes at the time of liberation and emigration.)
2. Where were you born?
3. What was your date of birth?

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe your family, including the role of your mother and father in the household and their occupations. Describe your family life and your daily life. 2. Describe school, friends, hobbies, affiliations with organizations. 3. Describe the nature of religious life in your family and community. 4. What were your family's political affiliations? 5. What are your recollections of your city or town before the war, including relationships between Jews and non-Jews? Any recollections of anti-semitism or racism of any kind? 6. If the interviewee is older, ask him or her to describe job/occupation, relationships, marriage, children. | <p>Childhood
Recollections</p> |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What did you know about Hitler or Nazism? How was the Nazi rise to power or Nazi policy understood in your family/community? 2. How did you become aware of the Nazi presence? Do you remember the first day of occupation? Any recollections of seeing the Nazis? Experiences? Feelings? Discussions? If you were a child, how did your parents or other adults respond to the Nazi presence? 3. Describe recollections of escalation of Nazi power—How did the Nazi presence change your life? Were you persecuted? Any plans or attempts to leave? 4. If in Germany—Ask about the April 1933 boycott, book burnings, Nuremberg race laws, <i>Kristallnacht</i> (“Night of Broken Glass”), etc. 5. Elsewhere—Ask about the imposition of the Star of David on clothes, Jews prohibited from public places, confiscation or destruction of Jewish property, forced labor, movement out of homes. 6. Describe ability or inability to run business or maintain occupation. 7. If not Jewish, what did you know about the circumstances of Jews? Did you know any Jews? Did you try to help them? | <p>Nazi Rise
to Power</p> |

HOLOCAUST/
WARTIME
EXPERIENCES

It is essential to know about the particular ghetto, transit camp, labor camp, prison, concentration or extermination camp where an interviewee was interned. Specific questions must be constructed according to that interviewee's particular experiences.

There is no "typical" Holocaust experience, although there are some categories of experiences into which many people fit. Alternately, there are instances where one person's experiences fit into multiple categories.

Ghettos
and Transit
Camps

Most often, incarceration in a ghetto or transit camp preceded deportation to labor, concentration, and/or extermination camps. Most Jews spent time in a ghetto or transit camp; most non-Jews did not.

1. When and how were you notified that you were to leave for the ghetto? (For some people, a ghetto was formed where they already lived; consequently, some of these questions may not be applicable.) How old were you? How did you get to the ghetto? Was the "trip" organized? What did you bring? What did you think about this "move?" What did you know? What were your recollections of arrival at the new site? Describe your first impressions. What did the ghetto look like? Was there a wall? If so, what kind?
2. What are your recollections about getting adjusted? Were you alone? Where did you live? Where did you sleep? Did you sleep well? Did you have dreams? Nightmares?
3. What are your recollections about living conditions—food, sanitation, medical facilities, housing? Describe relationships among family members and in the larger community. Describe daily life, including play and school for children. Describe social services—soup kitchens, hospitals, orphanages, schools, facilities for the disabled. Did you have any mobility or freedom of movement? Was the ghetto closed at a certain time? What sort of transportation was there in the ghetto? Were there any non-Jews in the ghetto? Any relationships between Jews and non-Jews?

4. If non-Jewish and in a ghetto, discuss your arrival, adjustment, living circumstances, work, relations to Jews and to Nazi authorities.
5. What sort of work did you do? Did other family members work? How did you get this “job?”
6. Describe any cultural, religious, or social activities—concerts, lectures, parties, religious observances. What about friends and recreation? Were intimate relationships important?
7. Did you hear any news of what was happening outside the ghetto? What did you understand about your situation? About the situation of Jews? Did you know about killings? Labor camps? Extermination camps? What rumors were in the ghetto? What did you believe? Did you or anyone you knew think of escaping or actually escape?
8. Were the lives of men and women similar or different? Different tasks? Different positions in the community? Were men and women treated differently? If so, how? Did you even notice that you were a man or a woman? In other words, did gender matter to you? In what ways? What about sexuality in the ghetto—relationships, menstruation, pregnancy, abortions, prostitution, rape?
9. How did people around you treat each other?
10. Describe the structure of the ghetto—*Judenrat* (Jewish Council), police, work, food and clothing distribution, housing, medical care, etc. Evaluate the work of the *Judenrat* and Jewish police: Were they corrupt? Helpful? Trying to help in an impossible situation?
11. Were you involved in resistance activities? What did you do? Were you a member of a group? Was the group primarily men or both men and women? Roles? Activities?
12. What kept you going? Discuss your motivations and inspirations, if they existed. Were you ever depressed? Did you ever not want to keep going? Describe your situation.
13. Describe the Nazi presence in your ghetto or transit camp. Give names of Germans or collaborators if possible. Describe relationships or experiences.

Labor Camps,
Prisons,
Concentration/
Extermination
Camps

1. Describe deportation to camp—What were the circumstances of selection of those to be transported? Who did the selecting? Were you arrested? Rounded up in selection? What was the method of transport? Approximately how many people were transported? Conditions during the trip? Any idea of the length of the trip? What were you told of the purpose of the trip? Did you believe what you were told?
2. Describe your arrival and first impressions. Did you even know where you were? With whom did you arrive? If with family, what happened? What happened to your belongings? Describe any thoughts, feelings, hopes, fears. What did you see, hear, smell? What was your condition on arrival? Time of year? Time of day? Were there prisoners at your arrival point? Describe any interactions. Describe your impressions of the camp personnel.
3. Describe your registration into the camp—Shaving? Showers? Tattoo? Delousing? Uniform? Barrack assignment? (Be sure to get the tattoo number or other identification used in the camp—number and/or letter on uniform, etc.) Bunk? Who was with you? From where? Were all the people in your barrack Jewish? If not, why were they there? Language problems?
4. Specific living conditions—food, sanitation, medical facilities.
5. Work—In which *Kommando* (work detail) were you? How were you chosen? Were you engaged in different kinds of work at different times? Were there privileged prisoners? What did you know about their situation? Was Sunday a day off? What did you know about the structure of the camp?
6. Daily existence—Roll call? Breakfast? Lunch? Dinner? Was there stealing of food? Brutality? Punishment? Latrines? Selections for the gas chambers? How did you sleep? Recollections of noises, smells, discussions, humor? Any cultural activities? Explain. If religious, did you try to retain some religious traditions? Explain what and how. Were there any religious observances? Did anyone receive mail? Was there a canteen in your camp? What was the method of currency? What was available? To whom was it available?
7. Illness or physical problems—Diseases? Dental problems? How did women deal with menstruation? Pregnancy? Babies and killing newborns? Medical treatment?

8. What were the relationships between people? Did you have any good friends? Did anyone ever help you? Did you help anyone? Were people affectionate with one another? Were there sexual relationships in the camp? Sexual brutality? Was there a brothel in the camp? Did you know anyone in the brothel? Who could go to the brothel? What were your relationships, if any, with non-Jewish prisoners? If non-Jewish, what were your relationships with Jews?
9. What are your recollections of the guards? Nazi personnel? Prisoner functionaries? Do you remember names?
10. Explain any involvement in resistance activities or the underground.
11. What were your experiences of witnessing killings and deaths?
12. What was your emotional state? What kept you going?
13. What did you know about the “outside world?” How did you learn?
14. Describe your evacuation and “death march,” if applicable.

It should be understood that escaping and hiding were interrelated. Often, people had to escape before they could hide or pass as someone they were not by assuming a false identity. These areas of inquiry are divided here only for organizational purposes.

Hiding/Passing
and Escaping

Hiding/Passing

1. How was the decision made to hide? With whom did you hide? What do you recollect about going into hiding? How old were you? What did you take with you? Did you know where you were going?
2. Who hid you, and what was your relationship with them?
3. What kind of hiding? A hiding place with no outside contact? Did you have a false identity? If so, explain how you acquired or assumed the particular identity. Explain the problems of maintaining that identity. For example, did you have to pretend you were not Jewish? Was that difficult? How? Who knew about your real identity? When did you resume your real identity? Or did you? Did you ever try to help Jews by using

your false identity? Describe any important relationships you had while in hiding or in passing. Did you ever engage in resistance activities? How? Doing what? With whom, if anyone, in the resistance movement did you have contact?

4. Describe the hiding place(s). Size? Kind of place? Conditions? Movement? What did you do all day? Work? Food? Sanitation? (If a woman, what about menstruation?) Sexual abuse or threats?
5. Feelings during this situation? Fears, dreams, hopes, questions?
6. Were you ever discovered? Did you ever have any close calls? How did you know whom to trust? Did you have contingency plans? Did you stay in one place? Was there a Nazi or German presence in your situation?
7. What kept you going?
8. How did you emerge from hiding?

Escaping

1. Describe your decision to escape. Were you alone, or with others? If alone, why? If you were not involved in the decision, describe how the decision was made by those with whom you escaped.
2. Describe others who escaped with you.
3. Describe preparations for the escape.
4. Describe the specific circumstances of the escape. Did it go as planned? Where did you go? Who helped?
5. What happened after the escape?
6. Dangers? Close calls?
7. What kept you going?

Resistance

Resistance activities might have been organized in ghettos, camps, prisons, cities and towns, or in the forest. They might entail individuals acting alone or in groups, spontaneously or with calculation. Thus, as usual, questions will have to be geared to the particular situation of the interviewee. Generic questions can only serve as a guide to create questions specific to a particular interviewee's experiences.

1. Describe how you got involved in the resistance. Were there entrance requirements?
2. Describe the kind of group(s) and the kind of resistance activities. What were your tasks? Were there rules within the group? What was the group's goal?
3. Give names and recollections of those with whom you worked.
4. Name of the resistance group? Jewish or non-Jewish? If you were with the Soviet partisans, how did you make contact? Did they welcome Jews? Did you ever have contact with other resistance groups? What were those relationships, if any?
5. How was the group organized? Who were the leaders? How were decisions made? How did you get assignments? Were there women as well as men? Children? Were tasks assigned by gender?
6. Did you receive training? Describe. Did you have weapons?
7. Where did you live? What sort of work did you do in the group?
8. Was there support (money, food) from the local population? Did they give the support voluntarily, or were they forced to provide it?
9. Describe friendships in the group. Difficulties arising from personality differences? Political or strategic differences? Any cultural activities—Telling stories? Singing? Religious observance?
10. Were most people in the group married or were there sexual liaisons formed for reasons of protection and/or love? Did married individuals also have lovers in the group? Was there sexual violence of any kind? Were there pregnancies? Abortions? Any babies born in the group?
11. What sort of medical care was available? What sort of medical problems? How were sanitary issues handled? Did women menstruate? Was that a problem?
12. Specific events? Activities? Smuggling? False papers? Bombing? Stealing? Fighting? Sabotage?

13. If you were not in any organized resistance group, did you know about resistance in any form? How did you individually resist? Why did you decide to resist? How often did you engage in resistance activities?
14. What kept you going?

POSTWAR
EXPERIENCES

Again, specific questions must be developed for the individual and the particular circumstances of the interviewee—liberation site, displaced persons camp experience(s), and/or emigration experiences. Obviously, if people went back to their former homes, to the United States, to Palestine (and after 1948, Israel), or to all of these places and/or any other country, the interview should reflect these specific experiences and provide some historical context.

Liberation

1. Describe your circumstances leading up to liberation. What was your physical and mental state?
2. What do you recall about the moment when you realized you were “free?” When and where were you liberated? By whom? What was your reaction to your liberation?
3. Describe the first few days of liberation. Describe the conditions of your environment. What did you do? What was your physical state? What was done to you? Was there any physical or sexual abuse that you witnessed or experienced during this period? How did your liberators treat you? Describe the medical help and the food supply.
4. What happened to perpetrators? Prisoner functionaries? Any retaliation from prisoners to their former captors?
5. Describe how you tried to put your life together. (Years of mending could be discussed.) Where did you go? With whom? What did you do? Did you look for family?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When and how did you get to a displaced persons camp? 2. What happened in the displaced persons camp? Food? Sanitation? Sleeping quarters? Illness? Fears? Nightmares? Hopes? What was the organization of the camp? Leaders? Police? Political and religious organizations? Cultural activities? What about education? Training? Food? Health? Clothes? Shelter? Black Market? Relationships? Marriage? Work? 3. Did you find members of your family? Old friends? If yes, were there problems adjusting to each other? If no, how did you adjust to others and the situation? 4. Did you talk about your experiences? Who listened? 5. How long were you in the displaced persons camp? When did you leave and how? Where did you go? | <p>Displaced
Persons
Camps</p> |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Where did you want to live after the war? 2. To where did you emigrate? When, why, and how? 3. Describe your early experiences as an émigré. How did you adjust to your new country of residence? Did you face any discrimination? Language barriers? 4. Describe living conditions, work, and/or family in your new home. | <p>Emigration/
Immigration</p> |
| <p><i>See “Concluding the Interview” in Chapter VII before devoting extensive attention to an interviewee’s postwar experiences.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How did you adjust to “normal” life after the Holocaust? What problems did you face? What gave you strength to go on? Did religion play a role? The arts? Political ideology? Any belief system? 2. What did you do in this new situation? Was it easy to make new friends? Did you talk about your wartime experiences with anyone? Did you identify with the people in the country to which you emigrated, or feel | <p>Beyond the
War/Life
After the
Holocaust</p> |

isolated? How would you characterize your relationships immediately after the Holocaust?

3. Did you go to school? Work? Marry? Raise a family? Have any serious illnesses? Did you have nightmares? Fears? Hopes? What were your living circumstances? What did you do for pleasure?
4. Can you talk about the long-term impact that your experiences during the Holocaust have had on you? For example, how did the Holocaust affect your family, raising children, values, trust, fear, your work? Are there sounds or smells that evoke past experiences? When you dream about the Holocaust years, what images still haunt you?
5. Do you think that survivors with a wide range of Holocaust experiences share commonalities? Describe.
6. Are your friends mostly survivors?

Although postwar history is a huge topic, there might be some moments that made an impact on the life or the thoughts of the interviewee who came to the United States. It will not be at all clear whether and in what sense most survivors of the Holocaust related to some of the historical circumstances listed below until you begin to talk with them. It might be worth exploring some areas with certain interviewees to get a sense of what, beyond the private life of the individual, the Holocaust has sensitized or desensitized in that individual's perception of events. Here is a list of some possibilities:

1. Atom bomb and nuclear age
2. Japanese internment camps in the United States
3. The Cold War
4. The era of Joseph McCarthy and the Red Scare
5. The Korean War
6. The Civil Rights Movement
7. The Vietnam War and the antiwar movements (such as the killing of students at Kent State and Jackson State Universities)
8. The New-Left Movement

9. The Counter Culture
10. The Feminist Movement
11. The assassinations of Medgar Evers, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert Kennedy
12. The presidencies of the United States from Truman to the present.
13. Israel as a state in 1948 and the wars of 1948, 1967, 1973, and 1982; the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem in April through August 1961; the Intifada and negotiations with the Palestinians; the wars in Iraq; genocide in Cambodia, former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Darfur.

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VII. CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

Chapter Overview

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- Commencing the Interview, 40
- Open-Ended and Specific Questions, 41
- Interjecting vs. Interrupting, 41
- Non-Verbal Responses, 41
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The oral history interview documents personal remembrances and reflections. The interview should elicit details about everyday life in cities, towns, ghettos, camps, and resistance movements, not just the outline of a story or general reflections on the story. The interviewees' day-to-day activities are essential—what they knew, saw, thought, dreamed, and feared; who were their friends, lovers, enemies; their experiences with ghetto *Judenrat* leaders, Jewish police; in camps, experiences with block leaders, *Kapos* (prisoners appointed to head work groups in the camps) or Nazi officials; their work; their relationships;

and even philosophic ruminations about their outlook on life, especially if they can put their own experiences in greater historical context. These details are important because they provide information that cannot be found in any other type of historical documentation.

There is no one “right way” to conduct the interview, and there are few rules. This chapter provides guidelines on creating a framework for the interview, but we cannot provide a step-by-step guide for conducting the interview. We hope, rather, that this chapter will evoke a sense of what it is like to be engaged in an interview, and will provide a starting point for further explorations into the interview process.

Arrival
at the
Interview

Before you arrive at the interview, prepare extensively, as detailed in the preceding chapters. When you arrive at the interview, put your personal concerns about the interview aside and help the interviewee feel at ease. An interviewee may wish to speak with you a little to “warm up” before jumping into the interview. He or she may have questions about the interview. You may wish to spend a few minutes getting familiar with the interviewee, and getting a sense of him or her. You may want to tell the interviewee that if he or she wishes to take a break at any point during the interview, that would be fine. Then, find a comfortable, quiet place to sit for the interview and/or proceed into the studio. *If you are conducting an audio interview, see Chapter VIII for more information on setting up and using your equipment; if you are conducting a video interview, see Chapter IX.*

Commencing
the Interview

If you are conducting an audio interview, see “Tape Slating” in Chapter VIII for information on verbally “slating” the tape before asking your first question. Visually slating the tape for video interviews is described in Chapter IX. After you slate the tape, we recommend that you formally begin the interview by asking the interviewee to state his or her name at birth, date of birth, and place of birth.

In his book *Doing Oral History*, Donald A. Ritchie suggests that open-ended questions be used to introduce a subject with the interviewee, and specific questions be used to follow up on the details. “Tell me about your family life before the war,” is an example of an open-ended question, while “What was your father’s occupation?” is a specific question. Ritchie suggests that opening a subject with specific questions gives too much control to the interviewer over the direction of the interview. According to Ritchie:

Open-Ended
and Specific
Questions

The use of open-ended questions has...been cited as a means of “empowering” interviewees—that is, by encouraging interviewees to relate and to interpret their own stories, such questions shift the balance of power from the interviewer to the interviewee.... The interviewer may be asking the questions, but the interviewee is actively shaping the course of the interview rather than responding passively.

As an interviewer, you should avoid intrusive interruptions at all times, but be prepared to interject questions at opportune moments. Ideally, you will have the opportunity to interject a question without interrupting the flow of the narrative. A rule of thumb for interjecting is to do so when the interviewee makes a major transition in the narrative. For example, if Mrs. X were chronicling her prewar life and then suddenly jumped to life in the ghetto, you may wish to ask her to pause for a moment to answer a few questions. This would be your best opportunity to ask whatever questions you have about prewar life, then allow Mrs. X to resume her narrative about life in the ghetto.

Interjecting
vs.
Interrupting

Most oral history interviews will remain unedited, and many “uh-huhs” can be distracting over the course of a few hours. Consequently, your responses, except for questions, should be minimal. When you feel the need to respond, but do not wish to ask a question, use eye contact or other forms of body language to express yourself.

Non-Verbal
Responses

Chronology of the Interview	<p>It is preferable that the interview be conducted in chronological order. When guiding the direction of the interview, you may find that the interviewee has a tendency to jump from 1941 to 1993 quickly. If this is the case, allow him or her to pursue the thought, but when you have a chance, gently bring the discussion back to 1941. No chronology is ever strict, and there is no sense in trying to keep the interviewee from occasionally ranging out of the chronological framework. The human memory often draws parallels between two events separated by great spans of time. It is your job to allow the interviewee the freedom to explore those connections, while keeping track of where you and the interviewee left off in the timeline of his or her life.</p> <p>If the interviewee suddenly jumps, for example, from being in Warsaw in 1941 to being in Bermuda in 1993 and then says something fascinating about what happened in 1993 that you would like to follow up on, what should you do? Should you ask the question, or save it for when you have chronologically reached the year of 1993 in the interview? Often it is best to make a mental note on these occasions, and tell the interviewee, “I would like to come back to that later. But right now, I have a question about Warsaw in 1941.”</p>
Taking Breaks	<p>For both audio and video interviews, you will have a natural built-in break every half hour to an hour when you need to flip or change the tape. You may want to use this opportunity to give the interviewee a chance to rest, to review your questions, or to strategize about topics you would like to explore when the tape is running again. Or, if the interview has a momentum that you do not wish to interrupt, you may choose to keep going instead of taking a break.</p>
Providing Historical Context	<p>There is certain basic historical knowledge that we assume a researcher listening to an interview will have, or will easily be able to learn. For example, we will not ask an interviewee to define the term <i>Appell</i> (camp roll call) each time it is mentioned. However, we might ask the interviewee specific questions about the <i>Appell</i>, such as how long it lasted. We do not want to ask the interviewee to give us a historical overview or lecture about things that he or she did not directly witness. Rather, we want to extract details about the interviewee’s own life.</p>

There are, however, certain types of historical context that the interviewee should provide during the interview. The interviewee should be encouraged to anchor his or her experiences in a chronological and geographical framework using dates, place names, and names of individuals, including family members, wherever possible.

Where the interviewee does not remember specific dates or locations, the interviewer can probe for clues of the general time frame or region in which a given event may have taken place. For example, the interviewee may remember the season in which an event took place, a political event that marked the time, or a larger city or town that was near the location in question.

In conducting interviews that focus on the Holocaust era, the most significant part of the interview should be the interviewee's experiences during the Holocaust and the war, rather than prewar or postwar life. However, it is important to learn about one's family and the sort of life lived before Nazi persecution, just as it is important to know what happened in the interviewee's life after the war.

Allocation of
Time in the
Interview

One should judge carefully about how much time is spent on the details of prewar life, unless the interviewer knows that he or she can return on another day to continue the interview, and thus can afford to dwell on those details. Remember that many interviewees are elderly and their ability to sustain a long interview in one sitting is not always possible. If you are limited to two hours, leave prewar and postwar to about 20 minutes each. If too much time is spent on prewar life, and the interviewee becomes exhausted, it will be considerably more difficult for the interviewee to speak about his or her wartime experiences.

Even if you have time for a longer interview, you may want to limit the telling of prewar experiences, depending on the health and stamina of the interviewee. If you have more time, you may wish to consider letting the interviewee tell his or her complete story. If possible, you should allow at least four hours per interview. Often people are finished with their story in three hours—sometimes more, sometimes less. Flexibility is beneficial in the conduct of an interview.

If you have the opportunity to continue the interview on another date, this may be helpful in maximizing the stamina of both interviewer and

interviewee. However, be sure to schedule additional interview sessions for the very near future, since plans often change, and you may end up with an awkward, uncompleted interview.

Concluding the Interview

Generally, for interviews that focus on the Holocaust era, the interview should be concluded after liberation, and preferably should cover some of the details of the first years after the war, including the experience of living in a displaced persons camp, if applicable, and emigration. If the interviewee has knowledge of, or participated in, postwar revenge killings or beatings, this too should be pursued. If the interviewee was a witness at war crimes trials, the interviewee should be encouraged to talk about that as well.

Before concluding the interview, you may wish to take a break and review your notes for any questions you may not have asked. *Some good final questions with which to conclude the interview are suggested in Chapter VI. See “Beyond the War/Life After the Holocaust.”*

Post- Holocaust Interviews

Ideally, you would have the opportunity to track the interviewee’s life after the war, and learn about his or her experiences with re-entering “normal” life. However, this is difficult to do in one interview session. If you have the opportunity to follow up with another interview session, in which life after the war would be explored, we encourage you to do so. Again, we recommend that you schedule any follow-up interviews to take place in the near future.

When exploring post-Holocaust life, it is important to learn how people put their lives back together, what sort of work they did, where they lived and with whom, and what effects the Holocaust had on their marriages and/or families, and/or other relationships. In other words, the post-Holocaust interview should explore ways in which lives were rebuilt after the war and what sort of impact, if any, the experiences and memories of the Holocaust had on the postwar lives of the interviewees. *See “Postwar Experiences” in Chapter VI for suggested questions to explore in a post-Holocaust interview.*

If the interviewee is a rescuer, liberator, war crimes prosecutor, perpetrator, or bystander, the emphasis of the interview should naturally focus on the impact of the Holocaust and the war on their lives.

After the interview is completed, you may wish to spend some time with the interviewee reviewing what will be done with the interview. It is a good idea to send the interviewee a personal copy of the interview within several weeks.

Before
Leaving the
Interview

If a note taker was present at the interview, this would be a good time to take a few minutes to confirm spellings of personal names and obscure places that came up during the interview. If the interviewee is too exhausted, or if no note taker were present at the interview, it is highly recommended that the interviewee be contacted with questions about proper spellings soon after the interview is complete. If you plan to do this, ask the interviewee if he or she would mind if you called with a few questions about spellings after a summary or transcript of the interview has been written.

You may wish to inform the interviewee that if he or she has any artifacts or documents related to the Holocaust, there are many archives and institutions that collect such items. The Museum often collects donations from individuals, and we encourage interviewees to contact us or another archive if they are interested in investigating the possibility of long-term preservation of their artifacts. *Contact the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Director of Curatorial Affairs for more information about donating artifacts or documents.*

Donation of
Artifacts

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VIII. TECHNICAL GUIDELINES FOR AUDIO INTERVIEWS

Chapter Overview

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The choice of whether to interview on audio or on video involves several factors, such as the budget of the project, the planned use of the interviews, and the preference of the interviewee. While audio interviews do not have as broad an appeal or potential audience as do video interviews, they are much less expensive to produce and are more archivally sound than their video counterparts. Additionally, audio interviews are sufficient for most scholarly inquiries, where the emphasis is on the interview transcript rather than the interview itself.

We have specifically tailored these guidelines for the professional cassette recorders that the Oral History Branch uses for its audiotaped interviews. However, much of the advice outlined here will be helpful for conducting audio interviews, no matter what type of equipment you use.

Our audio interviewers are trained to operate their own equipment. We have found it best for the interviewer to operate the audio equipment so as to avoid the added complication of using an audio technician. It is most often advantageous to have as few people in the room as possible during the interview, so that the intimacy of the interview process may be maintained.

Cassette
Tapes and
Batteries

Use only 60 minute tapes. Shorter tapes are best for archival purposes, because the tape itself is thicker and less likely to break than longer tapes. Be sure to come to each interview with plenty of tapes, and with brand-new batteries. “High” bias tapes are preferred over “normal” bias tapes.

Labeling
Tapes

Be sure to unwrap and label your tapes (preferably using a pencil so you can re-label if you do not use all of the tapes) before you arrive at the interview. You may wish to create professional labels at a later time. Each cassette case should be labeled consistently. Below is our suggestion for information to include on each tape case (you also may wish to include an internal cataloging or tracking number for each interview):

[name of organization responsible for producing the interview]
Interview with [name of interviewee]
[your name], Interviewer
[date of interview], Tape [number] of [number].

On each tape, label at least one side as follows:

[name of interviewee], Tape [number] of [number].

The Oral History Branch uses stereo or mono cassette tape recorders for its interviews. The difference between a stereo and a mono recorder is that a stereo recorder has two channels, which record sound from the left and from the right, while a mono recorder only has one channel. The mono recorder and microphone are simpler to use, while the stereo recorder has the potential advantage of providing you with the option of using two microphones, one for the interviewer and one for the interviewee. It is advantageous to purchase a recorder that has the capability of monitoring tape while recording, but that is a luxury, and not necessary for a good recording.

Digital recording devices may well provide superior sound quality over analogue records. This is a decision you will have to make after discussions with experts. As of 2007, the Museum is still using analogue tape recorders. No matter what type of equipment you use, be sure to experiment with your recording equipment before you arrive at the interview.

Tape Recorder

There are only a few features on most tape recorders that you will be using and referring to during the interview. These include the buttons that operate the tape (*stop/eject*, *record*, *play*, *rewind* (<<), *fast forward* (>>), *pause*); the features that allow you to monitor what you are recording (the *monitor* button and the *monitor volume* dial); and the features that allow you to control and observe the level at which you are recording (*recording volume* dials and *VU* meters). If you have a *limiter* button on your recorder, we recommend that it remain off. To record, the *play* and *record* buttons on many recorders must be pressed simultaneously.

Before you begin recording, and especially if you are not getting a high enough recording volume on your recording, check the microphone *attenuation* switch (may be labeled “MIC ATT” if you have one on your recorder) to be sure that it is set at “0.”

Microphone

A good microphone is essential to the creation of a quality recording. Do not use a machine with an internal microphone, as these microphones will record the sound of the machine’s operation. Look for a good quality microphone with a large (phono) plug that will be less likely to slip out during the course of an interview.

Every microphone has a “field”—a distance around it where it picks up sound best. If the microphone is too close, the recording will be distorted. If it is too far away, the voice will sound too faint.

If you have stereo capability and are using a stereo microphone, be aware that one side of the microphone will pick up sound on the left channel, and the other on the right channel. Stereo microphones are actually two microphones in one; therefore, they have two jacks—a left and a right. Most stereo microphones come with the left and the right jacks color-coded for easy identification. For example, the right jack may be marked with a red piece of tape, and the left jack with a gray piece of tape. Be sure that the microphone jacks are plugged into the correct channels on your recorder (if you have any doubt about whether or not your microphone is plugged in correctly, test it by speaking into the left side of the microphone while wearing your headphones and making sure that you are hearing your voice primarily in your left ear). Hold the microphone at an angle toward the interviewee, so the interviewee speaks into the middle of it, and the microphone picks up sound from the left and the right sides evenly.

If you have stereo capability and are using a mono microphone, plug the microphone into the left channel for the sake of consistency. The *mic mode* switch should then be set to mono.

Clip-on or lavalier microphones may be used for both the interviewer and the interviewee, if you are using a machine with stereo capacity. These microphones are very convenient but can be problematic if, for example, the interviewee forgets that he or she is wearing it and habitually fiddles with his or her collar. The interviewer should make sure that the interviewee is aware of the microphone, and does not touch it during the interview. If you are using a mono recorder, lavalier microphones are problematic because they will only record one person’s voice. The interviewer’s questions would thus be lost if the lavalier were clipped on to the interviewee.

If using a hand-held microphone, we recommend that you avoid the use of microphone stands. We ask our interviewers to hand-hold the microphone. Holding the microphone allows the interviewer to move with the interviewee and thus achieve a consistent sound quality throughout the interview. Additionally, microphone stands may absorb sounds from the surfaces on which they are set. Be aware that the microphone also will pick up the slight sounds that you make while handling it, so try to keep your handling of the microphone to a minimum. *See “Location/Setup” in this chapter for more information about positioning yourself and your equipment.*

Headphones

You should wear headphones throughout the interview. This allows you to monitor the sound quality and be sure that you are recording. Be aware that headphones have a left and a right side. They should be marked with an “R” and an “L” above each earphone. We recommend that you purchase a good-quality, comfortable set of headphones, as the cheaper ones can become quite uncomfortable after long periods.

If you are conducting an audio interview, it will probably be in the interviewee’s home. The interviewee will most likely have a favorite place to sit—probably a sofa, and probably not at the kitchen table. As far as sound is concerned, a sofa is a good place to conduct the interview. You want to be close to the interviewee, without having a table between you, which would reflect the sound and cause echoes. Ideally, you will have a coffee table next to the sofa where you can put your equipment.

Location/
Setup

When considering where the interviewee should sit, pay attention to what is behind the interviewee. Is there a door that may open during the interview? Is there an open window? Both of these may create ambient noise that can be avoided by seating the interviewee with his or her back to the most quiet side of the room.

It is preferable that windows be closed and air conditioners turned off during the interview. The ringer on the telephone should be turned off, if possible. Remember that refrigerators and air conditioners turn on and off automatically, and cause unnecessary noise—a good argument not to conduct the interview in a kitchen. Use your best judgment as to whether or not it is advisable to stop the interview for a loud noise, such as a passing airplane. It might be more important at that moment to let the person continue talking.

The interviewer must always balance the sound quality of the interview with the general comfort and ease of the interviewee. Too much fussing can make a person feel nervous and inhibited when it is finally time to start talking. However, keep in mind that for historical purposes, the tape must be listenable.

Recording Level Once you are seated and ready to start, get a recording “level” on the interviewee’s voice. As you record, talk about the weather or a favorite subject of chitchat. As your interviewee is speaking, adjust the *recording volume* dials so the needle on the *VU* meters stays mostly below zero, only occasionally pointing into the “red zone” above zero.

Note that if you are using a stereo recorder, there will be two dials that control the recording level, one for the left channel and one for the right channel. If you are using a single point stereo microphone, these two dials should stay together at the same level. If you are using two microphones (one for the interviewer and one for the interviewee), adjust each meter individually according to the voice levels.

As you record, the needle on your *VU* meter will bob back and forth with the fluctuations in the level of the voice being recorded, but it should generally stay between “0” and “-10” on the meter. The average level, in most cases, should be at about “-4.” Occasional peaking into the red zone is fine. However, if the recording level is too high, the voice will become distorted, and there is nothing you can do about that after the interview. It is better to have the recording level too low than too high. If in doubt, turn down the *recording volume* dials a little bit.

If you use digital equipment, different features may pertain.

Starting to Record After you have a recording level on the interviewee’s voice, rewind the tape to the beginning, and be sure to leave a few seconds blank at the beginning of the tape before speaking. One of the most common mistakes that audio interviewers make is to begin talking right at the beginning of the tape. The tape will not actually record for about five to seven seconds from the beginning.

Tape Slating We recommend that you slate the beginning of the interview and side A of each tape by stating the following:

“This is a [name of interviewing organization or project] interview with [name of interviewee] conducted by [your name] on [date] in [location]. This is tape number [1, 2, etc.], side A.”

The beginning of side B of each tape should be slated as follows:

“This is tape number [1, 2, etc.], side B of an interview with [name of interviewee].”

After the interview is completed, state the following:

“This concludes the [name of interviewing organization or project] interview with [name of interviewee].”

This is very important information should the label come off the tape or become illegible.

For the majority of the interview, the *monitor* button (if applicable) on your recorder should be set on “Source.” About four to five times an hour, set the *monitor* button to “Tape” to check how the recording sounds. This will cause you to hear a time delay in sound; therefore, it is best to check the tape this way when the interviewee is speaking, not when you are speaking.

Monitoring
the
Recording

Additionally, you should glance at the *VU* meters four to five times an hour to be sure that the recording level is right. During the interview, the level of the interviewee’s voice may change—occasionally he or she may speak loudly, and occasionally very quietly. Rather than adjusting the *recording volume* dials throughout these fluctuations, you can move the microphone away from or toward the interviewee to control the recording level.

Be aware that, if you follow our recommendation, each side of tape will be about 30 minutes or less. Therefore, you will want to wear a watch or bring a clock and glance at it occasionally to see how much time is left on each side of the tape. Try to anticipate the best time to flip the tape with minimal interruption of the flow of the interview. If a digital recording device is used, different rules will apply.

If you are recording on tape and cannot hear any sound going into the tape:

1. Check that the microphone is plugged in (and turned on, if applicable).
2. Check that the headphones are plugged in.

Technical
Trouble-
shooting

3. Adjust the *recording volume* dials (only if *VU* meters are staying below -20).
4. Adjust the monitor volume.

If you are having trouble getting a high enough recording level:

1. Check that the “MIC ATT” switch is set at “0.”

If you cannot hear any sound when you play the tape back:

1. Check that the *monitor* button is set on “Tape,” not on “Source.”
2. Check that the headphones are plugged in.
3. Check that the monitor volume is turned high enough (clockwise).

If the tape is not moving:

1. Check that the tape is rewound (bulk of reel on the left).
2. Check that the *pause* button is not depressed.
3. Check that there are batteries in the machine.

If you are hearing excessive background noise:

1. Turn down the *recording volume* dials.

IX. TECHNICAL GUIDELINES FOR VIDEO INTERVIEWS

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- The Interviewee, 58
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The decision to interview on video should be a carefully considered one, especially if the oral history project conducting the interviews has a limited budget. *See the introduction to Chapter VIII, Technical Guidelines for Audio Interviews, for some notes on the advantages and disadvantages of recording an interview on video versus audio.*

Ideally, there should be a large interview space so there is enough room for the video equipment, technical crew, interviewer, and interviewee. There should be enough distance between the interviewee and the background for depth of field. Most importantly, the site should be free, inside and outside, of noise interference.

Studio/
Location
Setup

In a studio, the set should be very simple. A cyc (backdrop screen) is needed that can be lit in a variety of ways. Mottled gray, brown, or blue are suggested colors for the cyc, without too much chroma or color intensity.

Composition Composition for on-location interviews should not include any distracting objects. The Museum prefers an out-of-focus, soft background with nothing definable behind the interviewee. The background should never intrude.

All Museum interviews are shot from the shoulder up, or in some cases, starting from a few inches below the shoulder, depending on the interviewee. In most cases, the interview is shot in a locked-down position, while attention is paid to accommodating the interviewee’s body movements. On rare occasions, one might come in closer than the shoulder shot.

Lighting A soft 750 watt light should be used as the key with a back light as a kick for good separation from the background. There must be adequate light in the interviewee’s eyes, and for the Museum’s interviews, some shading is created on one side of the interviewee’s face and shoulder. The lighting should not be flat. (Diffusion gels or light are sometimes used to warm up the look—not to add color.)

Sound We recommend that you use both a directional boom microphone and a lavalier (clip-on microphone) for the interviewee. Microphone the interviewer with a lavalier. The boom should be near the interviewee. The interviewer should speak clearly and at a normal, audible level (not too softly), or it will be difficult to hear him or her. There should be two channels for audio—one for the lavalier microphones and one for the boom microphone.

During the interview, if unavoidable sound interference occurs (such as an airplane flying overhead), stop the interview when it becomes too loud and distracting, then continue when the sound has abated.

Other Technical Considerations 1. We recommend Betacam-SP NTSC equipment and tape stock for interviews in the United States and Canada, and prefer them if the interview is being shot in another country. Betacam-SP PAL or SECAM is acceptable if NTSC (standard in North America, Japan, and Brazil) is not available.

2. We recommend that if you cannot use Betacam-SP equipment and want to use VHS equipment and tape, that you record the interview simultaneously on audiotape. Audio cassettes last much longer than VHS tapes, and the sound quality usually will be much better than if recorded solely on VHS.
3. Lay down one minute of color bars and tone at the beginning of each tape.
4. Set the time code at hour 1 for tape 1, hour 2 for tape 2, etc.
5. Do not use any diffusion on the camera.
6. Do not cut the camera without the producer's direction.
7. If photographs, documents, or artifacts are to be shown, a stand or table should be set up so the interviewee can explain off-camera what is on the screen. The stand should have a black background so the artifact, document, or photo can be easily seen. Under no circumstances should you have someone hold the picture in his or her hands when it is being filmed.
8. If using a digital videorecorder, consult with experts as to proper use.

The visual slate on each tape should show the name of the organization, the name of the interviewee, the date of the interview, the place of the interview if you wish, and the tape number (for example, Tape 1 of 3). You should ask the interviewee exactly how he or she wants his or her name on the screen—with or without a maiden name or name at birth, if different from what is used now. It is easiest to do the slating after the interview is complete.

Tape Slating

If you do not have the capacity to create a visual slate after the interview, you can write or type out the slate information and have the camera shoot it, while simultaneously verbally stating all of the above information before commencing the interview. *See "Tape Slating" in Chapter VIII for more information.*

X. AFTER THE INTERVIEW

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A day or two after the interview, you may wish to call the interviewee, find out how he or she is doing, and thank him or her for the interview. Often, the period immediately following the interview is a painful one for Holocaust survivors—or survivors and witnesses of other traumatic events—especially if they have seldom spoken in detail about their experiences. You also may send a personal thank you letter to the interviewee.

Thanking the
Interviewee

Perhaps the most time-consuming part of the interview process comes after the interview itself is completed. Although it demands time, the creation of finding aids for the interview (such as transcript and/or summary) is one of the most important aspects of the process. A transcribed and/or summarized interview is one that will be most accessible to scholars, researchers, and educators. Be sure to include important dates, place names, personal names, and events that are mentioned in the interview. Once a group of interviews has been created, a catalog and index of the interviews are of great importance in providing access to the interviews. *For further reading on creating interview finding aids, see “Oral History Methodology, Management, and Preservation” in Appendix 5.*

Creating
Interview
Finding Aids

The Oral History Branch often creates both a transcript and a brief summary for each of the taped interviews that it produces; for a number of projects, we only create detailed summaries. Creating transcripts is time consuming and, if the help of a paid transcriber is required, expensive. Many inter-

viewers transcribe their own interviews, which provides an excellent opportunity for the interviewer to revisit the details and reflect upon the content of the interview. *See Appendices 7–10 for the Oral History Branch’s written guidelines for creating certain interview finding aids, such as transcribing the interview, copy checking the transcript, authenticating the transcript, and writing summaries.*

Use and
Storage of
Tapes

Do not listen to the master tapes after the interview has been completed. Three or more copies of the interview should be made as soon as possible—a “protection copy” (also known as “protection master” or “sub-master”), one or two “user copies” (also known as “reference copies”), and a copy for the interviewee. The original “master” tape should be kept in a climate-controlled room and should be used only on rare occasions (such as to create additional protection copies). The protection copy should be used to make additional copies of the tape if requested by researchers or needed for other purposes. It also should be kept in a climate-controlled (approximately 60 degrees F; 35 percent relative humidity) room. The user copy should be made available for common use. You may also wish to make a special copy for a transcriber or summarizer.

Donating the
Interview to
the Museum

If you wish to donate the interview(s) that you conduct to the Museum, contact the Chief Archivist of the Archives for more information.

record
life stories

testimony

understand
listen

memory
history

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW
Washington, DC 20024-2126

recollect